

Roads or Rail?

"We are crying tears of blood over the crash on the [Melbourne] Monash Freeway and the subsequent traffic chaos. All the proposed solutions to this problem appear to be to build more roads. Is this Government totally blind or has the VicRoads lobby got such a hold that this is the only solution it and the Government can come up with? Why not put more money into heavy rail and encourage people to leave their cars at home? It has been proved that rail can deliver more people over any given distance and in less time than cars. So why can't the powers that be see this?"

Ref: Bill Eberbach, The Age, 17/9/09

More on Rail Deconstruction {in #123}

"The principal aim of the legislation, as mentioned in the name of the Bill is for the disused rail corridors to be made available for Rail Trails. Whilst the legislation may need some amendments to overcome the development concerns mentioned in the Sydney Morning Herald, we should not overlook that the use of the rail corridors as walking and cycling routes is a most environmentally suitable outcome. Many of these rail lines have not seen trains for a significant time, some for forty years, so having them made available for Rail Trails is a most desirable and sustainable outcome. There are some that may need more careful management before they are converted, and some that may not be converted if the reestablishment of rail is plausible, but one of the advantages of railtrails is that they preserve the corridor to allow the government to take back the corridor and use it for a railway again if future needs dictate. This is what happens in Queensland, I think in South Australia and all recent rail trails in Victoria. It's called 'Rail Banking' in the USA. There are many railtrails in Australia with many of them in Victoria and Melbourne. They are used daily by oil free commuters and tourists so make a significant contribution to Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Transport." See: www.railtrails.org.au

Ref: Frank Kinnersley, 23/9/09

More on Food Security {in #123}

"This is reminiscent of the disappearance of the market garden and orchard belt on the eastern and south-eastern fringe of Melbourne beginning in the 60's. Anyone 50 or more can probably remember Warrigal Road as the beginning of the 'country'. Even in the 70's one could still purchase fruit, eggs and even milk and cream at the farm gate of places within 30-40 minutes of the GPO." Ref: Dave Moyle, 23/9/09

Problems with Road Building

"Transport analyst John Odgers, from RMIT's school of management, recently released analysis (www.abp.unimelb.edu.au/gamut/about/odgers-report.html) showing that time savings promised by new freeways were not delivered and travel speeds on Melbourne's freeways have largely not increased over the past decade, despite billions of dollars being spent on new roads.

"Monash University transport expert Professor Graham Currie is a firm critic of the argument that freeways can relieve traffic congestion. He says that building new freeways - or improving existing ones - just attracts more cars. Ironically, according to Currie, the Government's massive upgrade of the M1 will not help travel times in the long run because the improved road will be an incentive for more vehicles. 'When this project is over (upgrading the M1 freeway) a lot of elements of this road will be just as congested as they are now', he says. Currie says the only way to overcome congestion is to provide mass transport options such as upgraded and expanded rail services. He points the State Government's proposal to build a new metro rail tunnel from Footscray to Caulfield and says such a tunnel will be the equivalent of '24 freeway lanes or six West Gate freeways'." Ref: Jason Dowling & Kate Lahey, The Age, 16/9/09

Problems with Ethanol

"Cars running on sugarcane ethanol can produce as many harmful pollutants as those using ordinary petrol, according a study published by Brazil's environment ministry. ... 'We want to make sure that customers are aware of pollutant emissions' when they buy a car, Environment Minister Carlos Minc said. The study ranked emissions based of a scale of 'green grades' that measured three pollutant gases that did not produce climate change but did affect the health of a country's population: carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxide. The green grade scale, ranging from 0-10, did not count carbon emissions, which were the main driver of global warming, because emissions from burning ethanol were offset by the carbon dioxide that sugar cane absorbed as it grew, the study said. The research also examined 250 so-called 'flex-fuel' cars, which used both ethanol and petrol and constituted about 85% of all cars on the road in Brazil. Among those receiving the lowest scores, eight were cars running on ethanol, including several with 'flex' engines, the study said, though all of the models examined met Brazil's standards for maximum emissions levels in 2008."

Ref: AFP, The Australian, 17/9/09

Cash for Clunkers

"The American love affair with gas-guzzling, oversized cars appears to be on the wane. SUVs and pick-up trucks make up most of the top trade-ins in the Obama Administration's 'cash for clunkers' scheme. ... The scheme, which was designed primarily to boost car sales rather than make America's roads greener, does not require purchasers to make a radical improvement to fuel efficiency in their new car. But the Administration claimed the program was getting the dirtiest vehicles off America's roads. However, environmentalists say it is far from clear whether the scheme will significantly reduce carbon emissions from cars and, even if it does, it is a costly way to achieve it, about \$US500 for each tonne of carbon eliminated."

Ref: Suzanne Goldenberg, Guardian, 14/8/09

Queensland Car Statistics

"According to the latest Queensland Transport statistics, an extra 363,834 vehicles have been added to Queensland roads between 2006 and 2008. Estimating conservatively that a vehicle is an average of three metres long, that's 1091 kilometres. The figures show the total number of vehicle registrations in Queensland increased by 9%; from 3.78 million in 2006 to 4.15 million in 2008. Of those, 70% - or an extra 254,684 vehicles - were registered to people living in South-East Queensland. Over the same period, there's also been an extra 19.5 million trips taken on public transport in the region.

"And if you think rising petrol prices or environmental concerns may have curbed Queenslanders' appetite for eight-cylinder cars, think again. Registrations for eight-cylinder cars increased faster than the overall rate, up 12.6% since 2006. However they still make up a minority of registrations. Of the 4.15 million vehicles registered, 56.3% - or 2.34 million - are passenger vehicles. Of these: 1.41 million (60.6%) are four-cylinder cars; 830,649 (35.5%) are six-cylinder cars; and 91,108 (3.89%).

"Despite an increase in the number of hybrid vehicles being registered, the numbers really don't make much of an impact. In 2006 there were just 196 petrol/electric hybrid cars in Queensland, or 0.005% of registrations. By 2008 the number had swollen to 1511, but they still make up just 0.03% of registrations. Queensland Conservation Council executive director Toby Hutcheon said the registration figures showed it was critical for the Queensland Government to encourage people - through car discount registrations - to take up hybrid cars. 'They must make it cheaper to have the hybrid, or more fuel

efficient car and more expensive to have the larger car', he said. ... Government figures showed Queensland's greenhouse gas emissions from the energy and transport sectors had increased by 89% in the past decade. He called for a fundamental change in the proportion of transport funding in Queensland, away from new roads and towards public transport."

Ref: Tony Moore, Brisbane Times, 14/8/09



'Bloody show-off. That's the fourth time he's passed us.'

"Brisbane motorists are crawling to work at barely a quarter the speed of the winning runner in Sunday's Bridge to Brisbane, it has been revealed. ... After road-testing 5 of the city's most congested roads, it was discovered it took more than 11 mins to travel a single kilometre on two roads. Travel on all five routes was at a speed less than 10kmh."

Ref: Tony Moore, Brisbane Times, 2/9/09

"Come on this is hardly a surprise, have a look at all the new developments

Springfield, Forest Lake, North Lakes, Ripley. None have public transport, or corridors that allow for future public transport."

Ref: Your Say, Brisbane Times, 2/9/09

"Its time we started spending some proper money on public transport - and not more buses either - they are just going to sit on the already congested roads. Light rail and heavy rail needs a lot of investment to force a cultural change in people's attitude to travel in this city."

Ref: Your Say, Brisbane Times, 2/9/09

Greenhouse Transport Statistics

"On average, a car emits 287 grams of greenhouse gases per kilometre. Approximately 197 grams of greenhouse gas are emitted per person, per kilometre, for each private vehicle. The equivalent emissions for carrying a person on public transport are 128 grams of greenhouse per kilometre. Every litre of petrol used emits 2.5 kg of carbon dioxide, predominantly from the exhaust, but also through the production of fuel." Ref: Melbourne News, City of Melbourne, July 2009

And Also ... (Strange Laws)

"In Galveston, Texas, it is illegal to have a camel run loose in the street." www.strangefacts.com/laws.html

On the Convenience of Driving

“One morning this summer, I drove myself to work and my daughter to school. We were a short way from home, when, unusually, our eyes were caught by a half-grown eastern grey kangaroo hopping in the front yard of a house down the road. Cute, pretty, nice to see a kangaroo (I'm not on the land so I don't have to see them as pests.) But with shock we both realized that the perfect young animal was horribly hurt, its right hind foot dangling, broken and bloody. Phone call, council, dog catcher, RSPCA. In the afternoon I take my dog walking in the bush. ... The atmosphere is gloomy despite the sunshine. As usual, I find myself following kangaroo routes. On the ground I see footprints and the dragging tail marks of kangaroos. It's hard not to imagine that some of them belong to the ill-fated one I saw this morning.

“I try not to think unkind thoughts of a person who drives in such a way as to crush just the foot of a small kangaroo, not bump it straight into oblivion. How sad that a vehicle interfered with a creature whose right to be here could be said to be greater than ours, a creature that crossed the road only in search of water in the creek which I've never seen dry down to its mud the way it is now. How sad that in the name of one's own convenience one can cause such pain and terror to the animal and sadness to the soft-hearted man who had to put it out of its misery, and to the neighbour who recognized the kangaroo as a regular visitor to his garden. Yet, that morning I drove to work only fifteen minutes walk away. I drove to school that day despite the school bus. I'm part of the race of petrol users and coal burners and car inventors. All tarred black with the same big brush.” **Ref: Rowena Evans, Bush Telegraph, ABC Radio National, 11/8/09**
www.abc.net.au/rural/telegraph/content/2009/s2652495.htm

New Road Laws in Victoria

“Drivers must show even more care when passing a tram: currently, road rules state only that a car must not pass the rear of a tram if a pedestrian is crossing. Now, if a tram is stopped at a tram stop, a car must stop too - regardless of whether they can see a person crossing the road to get on or off the tram. Parking laws have also been reviewed. A driver who moves their car to another parking spot must now move it off the length of road, or out of the area to which a parking sign applies. This means a motorist who moves their car to an adjacent parking spot once their time has run out would be liable for a fine.”
Ref: Clay Lucas/Barry Park, The Age 28/8/09

Implementing Urban Change

“When it comes to the realisation of major urban interventions, São Paulo is lagging behind other world cities. Buenos Aires, our closest neighbour, has with Puerto Madero succeeded in creating a high-end development on brownfield industrial land, which attracts business and visitors, despite its lack of integration within the city. ... Many of the international success stories in the regeneration of large-scale sites – such as redundant ports, railway, manufacturing and transport areas – suggest that considerable levels of public investment and management are necessary to make them work. In Brazil the private sector has historically taken the lead due to the lack of public funding or involvement in urban regeneration. Yet, a long-term perspective is a prerequisite of sustainable planning as opposed to the short-term returns on investment required by any commercial operator. In Washington DC, for example, the Corporation for the Development of Pennsylvania Avenue developed a 25-year vision for the regeneration of the area. The establishment of a delivery vehicle – an administrative structure with strong public as well as private sector representation – that manages and implements the project from inception to realisation is critical to its success in promoting economic development and generating new activities.

“The compact city model, with its reduced energy footprint that promotes intensification of well-connected inner city sites, has become the central objective of many European cities. Urban containment, smart growth and sustainable development within a defined urban footprint are central components of this new urban vision that not only drives the identification of individual sites – often highly contaminated areas near the centre – but also shapes policies that promote sustainable living ... A key element is public transport, a critical component of sustainable urban development. Canary Wharf, the massive office and commercial complex in London's East, only took off after the Jubilee Line extension connected it to the city's main metro network. The success of the Kings Cross development and the London 2012 Olympics site in the Lower Lea Valley are also highly dependent on their location next to major rail-based transport hubs that will create higher density clusters of a polycentric nature. In Milan, the viable redevelopment of ex-industrial sites at La Bovisa and La Bicocca into major office and residential neighbourhoods were predicated on their proximity to the city's extensive public transport network.” **Ref: Nadia Somekh and Carlos Leite, Urban Age (South American Conference), December 2008** www.urban-age.net

Iranian Oil and a Coup (Part 4)

In 1952 Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked US President Harry Truman to overthrow the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq.

“Steven Kinzer: *Now the CIA was a relatively new agency then they'd only been in business for about five years; it had never overthrown a government, and it was Truman's belief that the CIA should not do that. It was OK for the CIA to intervene and try to influence things in countries, but not to overthrow governments. So Truman told Churchill, 'No, we don't do that.'*

“Mark Gasiorowski: *The attitude of the Truman administration was that first of all they were very concerned about unrest in the Middle East. You know, this is the time when the State of Israel had been created, there was now the Palestinian refugee problem, there was nationalist unrest spreading throughout the Arab world, there was real fear that the Middle East would catch fire. And the Truman administration and especially Secretary of State Acheson, were very sensitive to this, and very much had the idea that the United States should not throw gasoline on the fire, and should not antagonise this unrest that was sweeping the region. And so the attitude of the Truman administration, really until it finally left office in January, 1953, was to try to act more or less in an even-handed manner as an honest broker between the British and the Iranians.*

“When the Eisenhower administration came into office, it was very different. You know, it was a change in leadership, pretty similar for example to 2001 when the Clinton administration was replaced by the George W. Bush administration, really any of the other times in modern American history when Democrats have been replaced by Republicans, you usually see the same pattern, you know, relatively open-minded, moderate, progressive, people being replaced by much more hard-nosed Republicans. And this was very much the case in 1953. The key foreign policy leaders in the Eisenhower administration who were John Foster Dulles, the incoming secretary of state, and his brother, the incoming CIA director, Alan Dulles. They had been talking already before the inauguration about doing something, with Mossadeq trying to get rid of him. They were also very interested and intrigued with the idea of using covert



intelligence operations to do things, and so they came into office very anxious to try to do something about Mossadeq, and indeed about two weeks after Eisenhower was inaugurated, in other words very early on, the initial decision was made by John Foster Dulles to start preparations for a coup. Now that being said, Eisenhower himself didn't go along with that for about two more months. It was not until mid-March 1953 that Eisenhower finally agreed that the US should go forward with planning a coup.

“Annabelle Quince: *According to a BBC4 history documentary made in 2003, the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, played a critical role in the coup. At midnight on the day of the coup, the BBC's International News, which was broadcast into Iran, announced the wrong date and time. This was regarded as a mistake at the time, but according to a 200-page CIA report acquired by the BBC history program-maker, the mistake was in fact a code signal sent to the Shah of Iran, to reassure him that the coup plot was proceeding as planned. ...*

Photo: Getty Images

“Steven Kinzer: *This coup is a classic in the history of American interventions abroad in one sense, and that is it seemed successful at first, but in the long run, when we look back on it, we can see that it had terrible, unintended consequences. The reason it seemed successful was we got rid of a guy we didn't like, and we put in someone who would do whatever we said, that was the Shah. But then what happened? The Shah ruled with increasing repression for 25 years, his repression produced the explosion of the late 1970s in Iran, what we called the Islamic Revolution. That revolution brought to power a clique of fanatically anti-western clerics who have spent the last 25 years intensely and sometimes very violently working to undermine western interests all over the world. That 1979 Islamic Revolution also inspired Muslim fundamentalists in many countries, including next-door Afghanistan, where a radical regime then came to power and gave sanctuary to Osama bin Laden, with the results we all know. So this is an example of one of many American operations which seemed to go well at first, but only now, decades later, we look back and see how badly they actually turned out.”*

Ref: ABC Radio National: Background Briefing: Oil, Democracy and a CIA Coup, 30/9/07 See: www.abc.net.au/rn/rearvision/stories/2009/2605245.htm

The Walkers of India (Part 5)

"The first step in most cities is to address the walkways to make walking comfortable and safe and improve the direct access routes to reduce dependence on motorized traffic for shorter trips. This is the first step towards the larger expansion of pedestrian zone to minimize motorized traffic in targeted city centres. They are also working towards composite environmental enhancement of the streetscape. Well maintained, obstruction free, clean and attractive walkable spaces. ..."

"Cities like Delhi have begun to implement mass transport systems. With right policies this should see a massive increase in pedestrian volume. Pedestrian ways will also play an important role in multi-modal integration. This will be a crucial link between the metro system and bus rapid transit systems evolving in Delhi and other cities. Management of the last mile that is mostly a walk trip facilitates transfers from origin to public transport nodes. ..."

"Mobility network needs to be built in a way that people are able to move around cities freely without the risks of accidents. It is the responsibility of society and the governments to protect them. Fatalities and injuries from road accidents is unusually and unacceptably high in Indian cities. There are substantial costs associated with accidents. The responsibilities of the urban planners is to design safe environments for pedestrians. Traffic and people do not mix. ..."

"Small and medium towns where the problems of mobility have just begun to manifest must make these interventions during the early stages of development and growth. ... It is important to make explicit provisions for pedestrian infrastructure in these towns. Pedestrian plan should be made mandatory in these towns. Pedestrian and bicyclist facilities should be designed along all roads and intersections. Designing of such infrastructure should also integrate the needs of the handicapped and the disabled. ..."

"Pedestrianisation cannot work if the modal conflict between pedestrians and motorized traffic cannot be minimized. Only this can enhance safety and walkability. Also city authorities should have powers to reduce traffic volume in targeted areas and peak time."

Ref: Footfalls – Obstacle Course to Liveable Cities, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 2009

<http://www.gtkp.com/uploads/public/documents/Knowledge/Walkability.pdf>

Greater Melbourne Authority

"Melbourne needs to overturn 200 years of city building and reinvent its attitude to public land if it is to become a more sustainable city.... 'A sustainable Melbourne is a more compact Melbourne', Marcus Spiller, director of SG Economics and Planning, said. ... The city's current urban structure is defined by injecting space between buildings, with each home being a cottage in a rural village, rather than designing buildings around central public spaces ... In this sense, public space is being treated as a 'residual asset', he said. There needed to be 'major intensification' around public transport corridors and suburban areas should be transformed into 'energy farms' But, despite densification being of 'metropolitan significance', local councils and state governments were not up to the task, Spiller said, calling for the return of a Greater Melbourne Authority. 'Our current institutional arrangements are not capable of delivering this revolution', he said.

"To a large extent local councils were in charge and would favour local needs over metropolitan ones, Spiller said. Added to the broth are the powers of state government institutions, such as the Priority Development Panel (PDP), the Development Assessment Committees (DAC) and the Growth Areas Authority (GAA). State governments are 'hopelessly compromised' in making decisions at city level The government should 'reinstate real metropolitan governance', ... in the form of a Greater Melbourne Authority that should be responsible for the city's highway system, invest and manage public transport, maintain city parks and oversee the city's water, sewerage and drainage systems. The authority would be democratically accountable, have rating powers, the capacity to issue infrastructure bonds and be responsible for creating a metropolitan planning scheme." Ref: Gemma Battenbough, Architecture and Design, 22/4/09

Roundabout Round House Saved

"Australia's only known rotating house has been spared the wrecking ball and will be protected under WA heritage laws. The so-called Round House in Mt Barker was built in 1958 on a rotating device so the building could follow the movement of the sun. Main Roads had earmarked the Round House for demolition to make way for a roundabout as part of the Mt Barker Northern Bypass."

Ref: Chris Thomson, WA News, 3/9/09



Picture:
ABC WA

Transforming Public Transport (Part 2)

“To change the way we transport ourselves, particularly the regular, less discretionary parts of our travel demands such as commuting duties, we need to address the perverse incentives that maintain them despite their many ‘contra-indications’. For most of us all these contraindications that so threaten human as well as environmental health are intellectualisations with little anchor in our personal, day-to-day, realities. Owning our vehicles, as we’ve seen, is part of the problem. If we did not have that huge fiscal sink in our garages - construction and maintenance, the cost of the land it sits on and its associated opportunity costs - we would think of cars as just another transport option in the mix confronting us. Without the burden of the DODO [Driver Only Driver Owned] default, we would develop our own unique set of options that we would come choose among with as little effort as today we drop to the current one, the ‘vehicle for all seasons’. These, more flexible options would involve heightened spatial and temporal priorities in choosing where we live, work, school, entertain ourselves and so on.

“Having paid all that money for our private motoring infrastructures, fuel prices appear to be a relatively small disincentive to using them. The real disincentive is rather greater than appearances would have one believe but its incremental onset (the weekly fuel bill) encourages us to minimize it. By the same token, simply exhorting people to use public transport and bicycles to access it, in the face of the numerous associated disincentives most people perceive, such as tickets and brutal, unstaffed stations and, in the case of bicycles, the presumed vulnerability of a citizen on a bike, is not enough. Work must be done to reverse the deepest perverse incentive to using urban transit systems viz. how we charge for its use.

“Currently most people encounter payment for their public transport use through the ticketing system. Ticketing provides a distorted introduction to public transport unnecessarily spoiling the public’s perception of public transport as a whole. Public transport is currently funded from ‘consolidated revenues’. Ticketing probably costs more than it raises. The reasons for saying this arise from considerations, beyond immediate system running costs, such as costs associated with:

1. *Hardware: the costs of erecting repeated iterations of ticketing hardware. This must include the \$B1 spent on the current Kennett system and the \$B1.3+ for the new ‘myki’ system.*

2. *Maintenance: beyond routine machine maintenance there will be unpredicted system failures as new systems ‘bed down’ and vindictive failures such as vandalism.*

3. *Price support: the reduction in income through politically motivated provision of concession fares, abolition of zone 3, free city-circle trams & similar.*

4. *Human service: nominally obviated by the new automated systems, inspectors will undoubtedly be around for some time yet (under ‘myki’ too) and on-call staff will have to be retained to deal with ticketing equipment failures & misunderstandings.*

5. *Alienation of the public:*

- *The ticketing process itself with its policing system has constituted a deterrent to use of the system; to the extent that ‘myki’ functions, this will decline however, it remains to be seen.*

- *Time used by, and stress caused to, the public in struggling to interact with our fare payment systems and their failures.*

- *The social costs (deterrent) of the ‘dark-spaces-of-terror’ that unstaffed and isolated stations represent to many people who would otherwise use them at night (see 6. next). In relation to this I urge readers to consider the implications of the red emergency button at railway stations! Firstly it is not easy to get to when you are being molested and secondly, if you do make it, will someone be there to aid you promptly? No-one was when I tried and, when others have tried they were trivialised for their reasons for trying!*

- *Alienation of a group of people: fare-evasion inspectors have become a malign presence in the public transport system and this is not an enviable situation for them, with again undoubted calls on formal and informal stress mitigation processes.*

- *Loss of revenue in fixed assets: inherent in all the urban land and unused buildings that languish, underutilized, behind the barriers that keep the ticketless (‘invalid’) out of the system + the small but continuing loss of revenue generated by the space occupied by the machines on trams and buses. These losses are appreciable. There are some 200 railway stations, mostly empty and all - but Southern Cross - underutilised. We will come to the ramifications below.*

“In other words tickets are an alienating employment scheme and we can surely do better than this. Finally, as a mechanism to monitor travel behaviour and gather travel statistics - one of the reasons given for ticketing - the current system must be very weak and I have yet to see figures showing how much better the ‘myki’ system will be.” {Continued. in #125}

Ref: Frank Fisher, Arena Magazine, 4/6/09